

Isaac Stamm House (Querean House)  
E side Gruber Road, .1 mi. S of Route 183  
Mt. Pleasant Valley vicinity  
Penn Township  
Berks County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-112

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. PA-112

## ISAAC STAMM HOUSE (Querean House)

Location: East side of Gruber Road about .1 mile south of State Route 183, about .1 mile northeast of confluence of Licking Creek, Tulpehocken Creek, and Union Canal bed, Mount Pleasant vicinity, Penn Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Bernville Quadrangle Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.410245.4472535

Present Owner: United States Government.

Present Use: Demolished in 1977 for the Blue Marsh Lake project, sponsored by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Significance: This is a good example of the Pennsylvania German adaptation of a highly ornamented, Italianate dwelling house design. The building is brick and decorated with the full regalia of mid-Victorian bracketing, cornice carving, and porch detailing, yet it is planned on the traditional three-room, Pennsylvania German model, complete with separate entries for the parlor and the kitchen.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The original part of the house was probably built about 1855. An 1861 atlas shows the house on its present site and lists the owner as Isaac Stamm. The barn and outbuildings are of similar vintage and undoubtedly were built at the same time as the house. The garage was added about 1920.
2. Architect: As in the case of nearly all Pennsylvania German buildings, the house was not designed by an architect in the formal sense. The relative sophistication of the design and construction, however, indicates that the house was planned and executed under the direct supervision of a master builder

or mason. Cornelius S. Stamm (1828-1902), a direct descendant of Werner Stamm, was a trained mason and may be responsible for the design and construction of this house, as well as the Eliza Stamm House (HABS No. PA-113) across the street.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of title information for Berks County before circa 1875 is vague and often incomplete; for this property it was impossible to establish the chain of title before 1884. It is highly probable that Werner Stamm acquired the land from the Penns about 1760. The Stamm family intermarried with the Heck family from at least 1800 and constantly transferred parcels of land between various members of the two families. Both the Stamm and Heck families were involved in the overall development of Pleasant Valley, planning and constructing many of its buildings in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
4. Alterations and additions: The original brick part of the house remains relatively unaltered, except for a bathroom installed in the south corner of the second floor northeast bedroom in 1948 and a dormer added on the southwest elevation above the porch in about 1925.

A large frame addition was built onto the rear of the house in two stages, probably about 1910 and 1930. This addition housed the "Pleasant Valley Luncheonette and Grocery" until about 1950.

3. Historic Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Isaac Stamm House was an integral part of the small linear hamlet known as Pleasant Valley, running between the Gruber Wagon Works and the Pleasant Valley Roller Mill. Strategically located along the former main road to Reading, paralleling the Union Canal, Pleasant Valley had two small hotels, a tannery, a mill, several farms, and the Gruber Wagon Works. The Reading to Bernville stage stopped at both hotels in Pleasant Valley, and the canal boats stopped there regularly (Canal Lock #41 was about one quarter mile from the Isaac Stamm House) to pick up and discharge cargo. It is probable, for example, that the bricks and sawn lumber for the Isaac Stamm House and the Eliza Stamm House were delivered by canal boat.

After 1881, Pleasant Valley was connected directly to North Heidelberg and Lower Heidelberg Townships by the Fox Lake steel truss bridge (known as the Pleasant Valley bridge before circa 1930) which spanned the Tulpehocken Creek. A smaller, wood bridge crossed the Union Canal just ahead of this bridge. An 1876 atlas, moreover, shows that the ill-fated South Mountain and Boston Railroad was planned to come within one quarter mile of Pleasant Valley. These transportation links allowed Pleasant Valley to prosper in the late nineteenth century.

C. Sources of Information

1. Primary Sources:

a. Interviews:

Fred Dundore, Mr. Pleasant, Pa., a grandson of the last Stamm owner of the Stamm Farm; August 10, 1976.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Unger, Reading, Pa.; Mrs. Unger is the daughter of the last Stamm owner of the Stamm Farm, and both Mr. and Mrs. Unger were long time residents of the farm; August 17, 1976.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Auchenbach, and their son Thomas, Pleasant Valley, Pa., residents of the Isaac Stamm House and long time residents of the Pleasant Valley area; August, 1976.

b. Maps:

Davis, F. A. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Berks County.  
Reading, Pa.: Reading Publishing House, 1876.

Township Map of Berks County Pennsylvania "from actual  
Surveys by L. Fagan". Philadelphia, Pa.: H. F.  
Bridgens, 1862.

2. Secondary sources:

Arthur, Eric, and Dudley Whitney, The Barn, A Vanishing  
Landmark in North America. Greenwich, Conn.: NY  
Graphic Society, 1972, esp. pp. 84-113.

Dornbusch, Charles H., and John K. Heyl. Pennsylvania German Barns. Allentown, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, Vol. 21, 1958.

Fox, Cyrus T. Reading and Berks County Pennsylvania, A History. NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1925, 184-185; gives brief account of the Stamm family history.

Long, Amos, Jr., The Pennsylvania German Family Farm: A Regional Architectural and Folk Cultural Study of an American Agricultural Community. Breinigsville, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society, Vol. VI, 1972.

Meiser, George, IX. "Historical Survey of Blue Marsh Project Area." Historical Review of Berks County XXXVI (Summer, 1971), 98-110; general study with good map of the area and the landmarks.

Moser, Nick. "Penn Township." Reading Sunday Eagle Magazine (December 1, 1957), 1-3.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel  
Project Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer, 1976

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a good example of the penetration of a fashionable, urban style into a highly developed folk culture. The house is heavily ornamented, being built of brick with pretentious front and side porches and a pierced and bracketed cornice. The plan of the house, though, is decidedly traditional. The front part of the house is divided into the parlor (die Schtubb) and the parents' or grandparents' bedroom (die Kammer), while the rear part of the house is devoted to a large kitchen (die Kich).

The planning and siting of the outbuildings are also of interest since the property was developed as a dwelling house and not a farm. The traditional outbuildings are, therefore, much reduced in scale compared to farmstead buildings, and obviously planned merely as service appendages to the house.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair; all of the outbuildings are in ruins.

#### B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The original brick portion of the house is two-and-a-half stories tall, 24'-4" across the three-bay front by 38'-0" deep. The one-story rear frame addition is connected by a 6'-4" long hallway and measures 16'-9" (two-bay front) by 34'-7" deep.
2. Foundations: The foundations are constructed of randomly laid rough limestone masonry with crude quoining.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: The outside walls are made of reddish soft brick, laid in common bond. The rear frame addition is clapboarded and painted white.
4. Structural system: The walls are composed of brick bearing walls about 1' thick. At the second and attic-floor levels, two star-shaped iron wall anchors are visible on the end walls of the front main block.

The floors are held up by large, sawn wood beams and joists lapped at the joints. The roof is composed of wood rafters nailed into a central ridge pole.

5. Porches: The 10'-5" by 10' entrance porch on the northwest facade has four chamfered corner posts and a five-step wooden stairway. The foundation of the porch is brick and the floor is wood, tongue and groove boards. The porch has a shed roof covered with tin painted red. The porch, painted white with green trim, is heavily ornamented with pierced fan brackets, a carved wooden pineapple, and a pierced frieze.

On the southwest facade there is a two-level frame porch recessed into the main block of the building. The upper porch and half of the lower porch have been enclosed and

clapboarded. The doorway leading to the lower level has a pierced, ornamental bracketing network overhead. Entry to the lower porch is from a five-step, concrete stairway of recent origin. The interior walls of the lower porch are brick painted white. The cornice of the porch has brackets and a pierced frieze.

6. Chimneys: There is an interior end chimney in each of the three gable ends of the structure.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front entry door is an ornamented, wood panel door with a large, single light. A wooden storm door with twelve lights is directly in front of it. The door through the side porch is a wood panel door with two lights. It has a light wooden door with a large screen in front of it. The outside entry door to the cellar is covered by a pair of slanting wood doors, while the doorway itself is formed by a brick arch. The two doorways in the rear addition are composed of wood panels with a large single light.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Most of the windows on the first and second floors have two-over-two-light, double hung sash. They have wooden sills and flat wood lintels. There are two smaller, two-over-two-light double hung sash windows in each of the gables in the front block of the house. There is a single, two-over-two-light double hung sash window in the gable of the end wall of the rear wing. In the enclosing wall of the first-floor side porch are a pair of ornamental windows, each composed of a large central light surrounded by ten small lights. There are four, one-over-one-light double hung sash windows in the enclosing wall on the second floor of the side porch. The basement windows are covered with a heavy cast-iron grating. The windows in the rear wood addition have one-over-one-light double hung sash. There were shutters painted white on all of the windows in the brick part of the house until recently.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main block of the house has a gable roof running in two directions, covered with green asbestos shingles. The wood addition to the rear reflects the two stages of building: the section directly attached to the brick part of the house has a gable roof, while the farther section has a shed roof. The roofs on the additions are covered with tar paper over wood shingles.
- b. Dormer: The dormer on the southwest elevation has a shed roof and two casement windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor reflects Pennsylvania German farmhouse planning traditions. The original part of the house is divided into three rooms: the kitchen, the parlor, and the parents' or grandparents' bedroom. The door on the front facade leads directly into the parlor; the adjoining bedroom is reached through a doorway in the northeast wall of the parlor. There is also a doorway leading from the parlor directly into the kitchen, but the main entrance to the kitchen is through the doorway in the side porch. The traditional dual entry system is thus preserved even though the outward appearance of the building is non-traditional. Entry to the wood addition is through a doorway in the rear wall of the kitchen.
- b. Second floor: The stairway to the second floor leads directly to a small hallway which provides access to the three upstairs bedrooms. The two bedrooms on the northwest side are roughly equal in size, while the bedroom on the southeast side has been subdivided to allow for the installation of a modern bathroom in the south corner. The upstairs porch is reached from a doorway in this bedroom.
- c. Basement: The basement is a single, undivided space reached by a stairway directly below the stairway leading to the second floor. It has a coal bin in the northwest corner, and is currently used primarily as a storage and work space.

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2. Stairways: All the stairways in the house are straight runs. The stairway connecting the first and second floors can be reached from doorways in both the kitchen and the bedroom. The stairway to the attic can also be entered from doorways in either of the adjoining bedrooms. The double entry stairway ensured privacy in adjoining rooms, and was a common planning motif in Pennsylvania German houses of nineteenth century origin.
3. Flooring: All the rooms have random-width, pine-board flooring. The floor of the attic is made of tongue and groove boards, while the basement is concrete and packed earth.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All the rooms on the first and second floors are plastered, and painted pastel colors or covered with decorator wallpaper. The ceiling in the kitchen is made of tin stamped in an elaborate ornamental pattern.
5. Doorways and doors: All the doorways are surrounded by simple wood molding and all doors are composed of wood panels. All doors and moldings are painted light shades of yellow.
6. Decorative features and trim: There is a built-in, slate-topped sink in the southeast corner of the kitchen with the original built-in cabinets above. All rooms have simple baseboards painted light shades of yellow. All the windows and closets are surrounded by simple wood moldings painted similarly.
7. Hardware: All the doors have traditional iron hardware. Some of the doors have porcelain knobs. There is a wood doorknob on the doorway leading to the attic from the northwest bedroom.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
  - a. Lighting: Most of the rooms are fitted with early versions of modern electrical fixtures, usually mounted in the ceiling in the center of each room. Most of the electrical switches are the early push-button type.

- b. Heating: There is at present no working fireplace in the house. A large kitchen fireplace is still in place in the west wall of the kitchen, but it has been enclosed for use as a closet. The house was heated by a coal furnace at one time, but is now heated by coal stoves in the kitchen and parlor.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west towards Gruber Road and is sited at the peak of a knoll. The confluence of Licking Creek, Tulpehocken Creek, and the bed of the Union Canal is about 400 feet from the front door. The placement of the house on high ground helps secure it from flooding, but also ensures a good view over the surrounding area and a prestigious approach. The house is located on what was once the main road to Reading, and is an integral part of the linear grouping of buildings known as Pleasant Valley.
2. Landscape design: As in the case of nearly all Pennsylvania German houses and farmsteads, there was never a professional attempt to design the surrounding landscape. However, the siting of the house and outbuildings does reflect care on the part of the builders. The house is sited on a knoll and has a substantial earthen terrace with stone retaining walls surrounding the front porch. The driveway leads by the southwest side of the house, and continues to the back of the lot to the barn. The barn is a small version of a bank barn, having been built into an embankment to allow for entry on two levels. A chicken house, garage, and privy are arranged conveniently between the house and barn. The site originally was well planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers, but has been allowed to go unattended for the past few years.
3. Outbuildings:
  - a. Barn: The barn is a small, approximately 50' by 30', version of a traditional Pennsylvania bank barn, and lies about 100' east of the house. It is a sawn timber frame structure, covered with vertical board siding painted red. The foundation is constructed of randomly laid limestone masonry. The front wall on the lower floor is wood and contains three, two-piece, "Dutch" doors. The first-floor plan is made up of two sets of stalls with one service alley. About one third of the forebay has been enclosed and is entered by a set of large doors.

There are four wooden doors used for entry to the second floor on the downhill side, and four, two-over-two-light double hung windows directly above them. The uphill side of the second floor is entered by a single set of large barn doors. The small size of this barn seems to indicate that it was used primarily as a stable and carriage house.

- b. Chicken House: This two-story, gable-roofed structure lies between the house and the barn. The second floor was used to house chickens and the first floor for pigs (the pig pen being between the chicken house and the barn). The building is timber frame construction with a wood shingle roof.
- c. Garage: This one-and-a-half-story, gable-roofed wood structure was built to house early automobiles. It is simple stud construction covered with a wood shingle roof. Measuring about 12' by 16', it is entered through a set of large wooden doors. It is located at the south side of the driveway, about halfway between the house and the barn.
- d. Privy: The privy is located just beyond the southeast corner of the chicken house. It is a wooden structure, measuring about 5' by 7'. It has a shed roof covered by wood shingles.
- e. Root cellar: This underground arched cellar is located just beyond the rear wood addition to the house. It is reached through a set of slanting wood doors and down a steep set of stone steps. There is a brick floor, and the interior of the arch has been plastered and whitewashed. The arch measures about 7' by 12' and is about 6' high at the highest point.
- f. Smokehouse: This structure is located about 30' northeast of the house, and measures about 6' by 8'. It is a simple, gable-roofed, wood structure used to smoke meats. The stove is brick, built on a limestone foundation. The roof is wood split shingles.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Tulpehocken Creek Survey was undertaken in 1976 by the Historic American buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in cooperation with the Philadelphia office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction Blue Marsh Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was prepared on site by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania); student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Gregory Lee Miller (University of Illinois), Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Daniel F. Clancy (University of Pennsylvania), and Steven M. Shapiro (University of Maryland); and HABS project historian Thomas H. Kheel (Cornell University) and HAER project historian Stuart Campbell (University of Delaware). The drawings were completed in the HABS office in 1977 and 1978 by Mr. Clarke and HABS architects Susan M. Dornbusch and Bethanie C. Grashof. The HABS data was edited for transmittal in 1980 by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff.